Skype-based Educational Method: Experiences in Language Learning

Dusan Fedic, and Katarina Krpalkova Krelova

Abstract — The contribution provides an activity overview of the two European universities in area of Skype-based education. There is the overview of Skype-based education program at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. The contribution brings the needs analysis results of students and describes the experiences of the Skype-based educational method in Language Learning. The innovation of the language learning program was based on the partnership with the University of Economics in Prague.

Within a three-semester business language training, soft skills essential for German language are being developed. The purpose of the paper is also to evaluate the traditional methods of teaching and suggest innovative teaching methods; especially Skype-based teaching method. Basically teaching process is a communication model, which consists of sending and receiving information. Business language training couldn't be effective without the business knowledge. The University of Economics in Prague deals with the teaching methods of economic subjects. The innovation of the curriculum is based on the implementation of the business knowledge and skills. This has been possible due to close cooperation between both universities. The contribution brings the results of the cooperation and it describes the innovated curriculum. The paper provides an overview of the teaching methods in this curriculum and their impact on the business and language knowledge of the students. Along with the developed business and language skills, the students and graduates increase their chances to compete in professional environment.

Keywords—Innovative methods, business education, German for specific purposes, Skype application

I. INTRODUCTION

THE University of Economics in Prague entered into partnership with The University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava in academic year 2012/13. The aim of this partnership was innovation of the syllabus for students of German language in business communication at The University of Trnava.

The graduates of the mentioned subject of study are supposed to be able to deal with various sorts of professional and expert situations in German language. The staff of the Department of German studies was looking simultaneously for

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the means of providing the students with expertly erudite knowledge of the Linguistics, technical language and technically erudite knowledge of other necessary scientific fields for the future practice. Within the context of potential professional classification, scientific discipline of corporate economics plays a fundamental role. This is due to the fact that the graduates should potentially work in German speaking companies or companies that cooperate with such companies. International cooperation of the two universities began to obtain tangible content.

The education in the Slovak Republic involves specialized education, further training, re-training courses as well as distant and virtual education. The importance of education in Slovakia has been reflected in the key concept documents on the human resources development.

II. INNOVATIVE METHODS OF TEACHING

During the initial stage, the personnel of both Universities raised a question about the potential additional content of current syllabus and methods of teaching. The method should not only teach and enhance the level of acquired knowledge but it should also educate the students on a personal level. The Didactics yet does not contain unified, generally accepted classification of teaching methods. E-learning is one of the contemporary teaching methods that are also employed at universities.

Nowadays, information technology penetrates also teaching of foreign languages. So called e-learning (electronic education) is a manner of teaching that uses multimedia computer games and, nowadays more frequently, the Internet. E. Daniš defines this method as follows: "E-learning is a process of purposeful and effective use of information and communication technologies in education, "[1]. In a sense, e-learning may be defined as a combination of educational and training activities with utilization of modern information and communication technologies. Computer devices (animations, texts, videos, records, visual aids) deepen motivation and allow simulation of difficult phenomena. Syllabus material is distributed on a storage medium (e.g. CD ROM) and students can learn on-line or off-line, with or without a tutor, part-time or full-time.

Original LMS systems were criticized for high administrative skills demands and thus LCMS began to be implemented [2]. These are more focused on education and less on administrative support. E-learning continues

permeating various fields of education and many untraditional projects are being created. Contemporary trends in economic education include:

- Blended-learning: This type of e-learning signifies combined teaching, ergo combination of standard schooling (attendance, presentation, face-to-face) and e-learning.
- Learning Content Management Systems (LCMSs): This term is often linked to LMS. It emphasizes training and simplifies administration part.
- Web collaboration & live eLearning – It deals with transferring of actual classes on-line. Significantly supported by communication elements, virtual classes, on line lectures and workshops are created.
- Simulations, learning games, videos and storytelling – Development of games and simulations deepens motivation, intention to win and to learn something. Educational programs and video samples. It focuses on interpersonal relations and social education via story creation, presenting positive and negative examples, in a form of play.

Use of information technology in class is not only an attractive change and a possibility to attract students´ attention but also a tool for an effective work of a tutor in a class. Syllabus – a well-equipped computer classroom is an imperative condition. A great advantage is the possibility to process any topic in the most favorable way. Presentation technologies - in this case, computer fashions various phenomena which are visually projected and accompanied by explanation of a tutor [3]. E-learning technologies are greatly employed during training and examination by means of electronic tests, group practicing throughout projected assignments. For home assignments there are various e-courses, educational texts, multimedia encyclopedias, electronic games [3].

III. SKYPE-BASED EDUCATION

Skype is very popular software application that allows users to make voice calls and chats over the Internet free of charges. It´s very easy to download and install this application and we can use it in few minutes. We can find this application in the computers all over the world.

Today there are more than 630 million users of Skype. The number of users rises every day. There were only 405 million users of Skype two years ago.

It is possible to get group video calling with this application. This feature can help to work effectively with the students or with the people, who need to do some Skype-based education program. It´s rather complicated for people to attend at the education program. With the group video calling they save time plus they can cut the travel costs. With the Skype application we can also broadcast the online presentation worldwide.

Skype is not only video calling. We can share easy files with extra materials just with one click. The members of the group

can download the files in minutes and you can discuss it. You can also chat and so you can help the members to understand the problem. Skype application has a lot of possibilities how to work everywhere. Please submit your manuscript electronically for review as e-mail attachments. When you submit your initial full paper version, prepare it in two-column format, including figures and tables.

IV. NEEDS ANALYSIS

The authors proceed the students' needs analysis about education directed to the Skype application. More than 250 students received questionnaire with the questions mentioned below.

The aim of the questionnaire was to find out, if the Skype-based education program would be interesting and possible among the students in the future.

What Internet access do you use?

broadband Internet access in household	52.5
broadband Internet access at work or school	31
3G mobile Internet access with data limit	6
3G mobile Internet access without data limit	3.9
2G mobile Internet access	1.6
other connection	4.9

Fig. 1 Results of Internet access
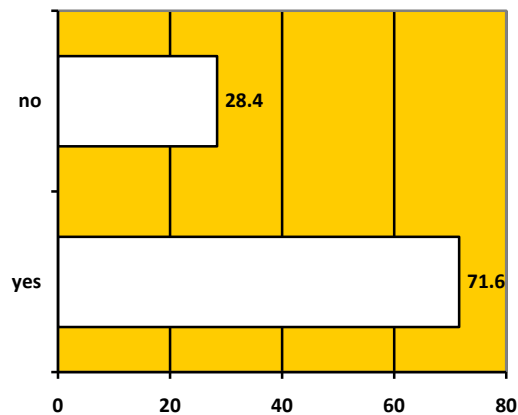
Do you use software application Skype?

Fig. 2 Results of the use of the application

Among 258 respondents the most frequent answer is "high speed Internet in household". Least frequent answer is "2G mobile Internet access".

More than 70 percent of students use the software application Skype, so we can recommend the using this application for education programs.

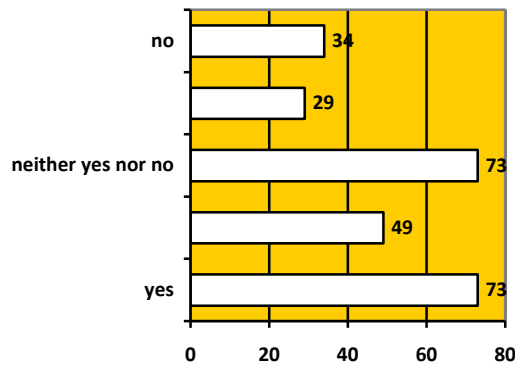**Would you use the possibility of education via Skype application?**

Fig. 3 Results of the possibility of education via Skype

What is your evaluation of communication via Skype?
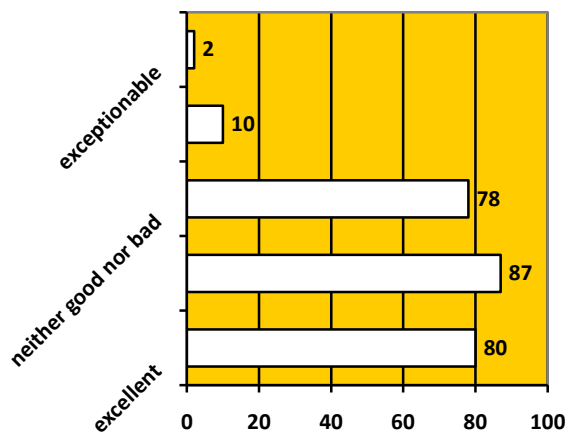

Fig. 4 Results of the evaluation of communication via Skype

The very important question was about the expectations by education via Skype.

What are your expectations by education via Skype?

Here are some of expectations:

- Interesting ideas providing study possibility at home. I expect "direct" and regular contact with a supervisor, readiness to solve misunderstood topics via dialogue and it means better explanation, accessibility, time flexibility,
- I expect that I gain same information by education per Skype like for example at school. I have an access to information everywhere where is Internet connection,
- The application has a high user comfort. Online communication, possibility of documents sending is accessible and simple comparing to other e-learning programs,

- Skype is a good application but technical equipment needed to proceed it have still higher quality what can cause communication problems,
- It will offer bigger possibilities of distance study.

V. TEST SKYPE-BASED PROGRAM

The teachers have prepared extra materials for Skype. The short PowerPoint and Word files could be sent very easy per this application and the students could see the teacher, the study materials and their colleges on the screen. The chat feature of the Skype was used instead of the usual blackboard.
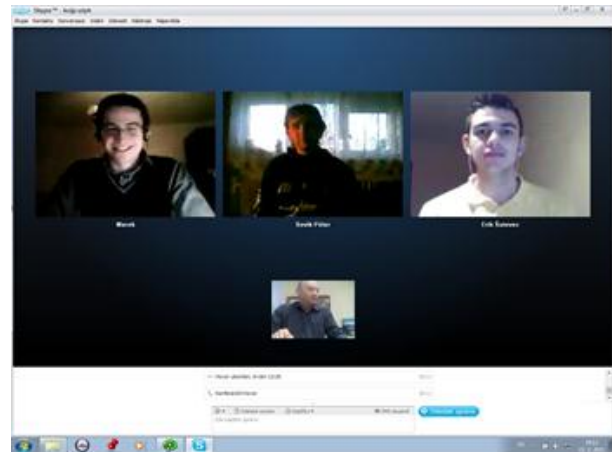

Fig. 5 Screenshot of the Skype session with the group video calling during the test Skype-based program

The evaluation of the test program was very positive. All of the participants were satisfied with the Skype-based program. The negative experiences were just because of the problems with the Internet connection. The participants with other connection like the broadband connection had problems with the participation at the test program. The broadband Internet connection is necessary for the Skype-based programs. The students have evaluated very positive, that they can cut their travel costs, because they don't need to travel to the University and so they save time and money.

VI. INNOVATION OF THE SYLLABUS

Within a context of the syllabus of a subject of study, innovation took place in the contents of subjects: Technical language - Economy, Technical language – Business, Technical language – Business Negotiations. Contents of the subjects were enriched by substantial topics e.g. preparation of business plan, problems and shortcomings at business negotiations, stages of commercial intercourse. These currently relevant topics had not been included in syllabus and after recommendation of the University of Economics have been employed. From the point of view of professional expertise, all topical units required progress. Questions related to the field of Linguistics and Technical language were not problematic. Many technical questions related to the field of economics

were left without an answer. Solution was to supplement lectures with on-line entries of UoE personnel via Skype application. Short pre-planned on-line entries took a few minutes and gave students a chance to discuss problematic issues related to economics with an expert. Entries were conceptually planned to fit into a lecture. In this manner, blended eLearning, Web collaboration and live eLearning have been applied. Individual entries were recorded and uploaded to the Internet and thus another trend in electronic education (videos) was applied.
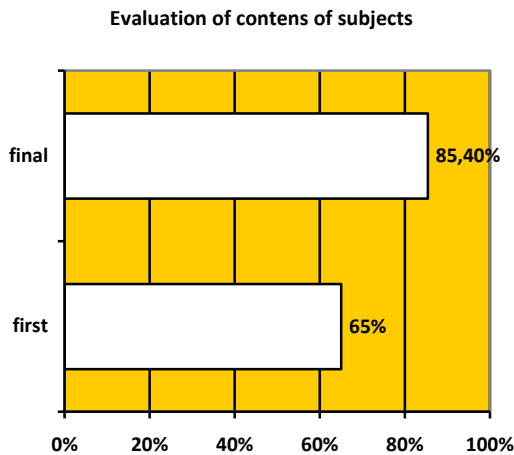
Evaluation of contens of subjects

Fig. 6 First/final evaluation of contents of subjects

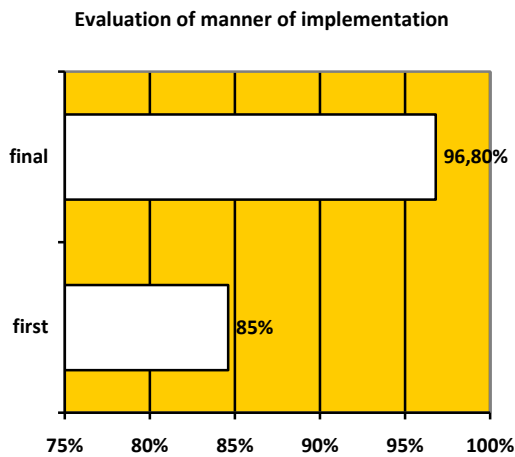**Evaluation of manner of implementation**

Fig. 7 First/final evaluation of manner of implementation

Student evaluation of a new content and methods took place in various stages after initial testing. The evaluation was concerned mainly with satisfaction with the contents of subjects and manner of implementation and the role of on-line entries. The results and commentaries were integrated into final version of the syllabus of given subjects.

All students of the Department of German studies took part on evaluation.
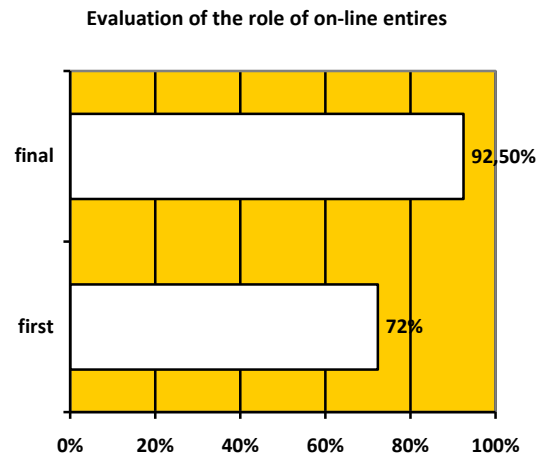
Evaluation of the role of on-line entires

Fig. 8 First/final evaluation of the role of on-line entries

The results of the first and the final positive evaluation are different and they indicate their positive development after the integration of the commentaries.

VII. CONCLUSION

The results and commentaries were integrated into final version of the syllabus of given subjects. The students were satisfied with the subjects. The innovated syllabus consists the online Skype entities, individual and group video calls with the experts from Prague. Nowadays, there is a big interest in these subjects.

We consider as very important that graduates are able to form work places and they do not stay unemployed or look for free positions [4].

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